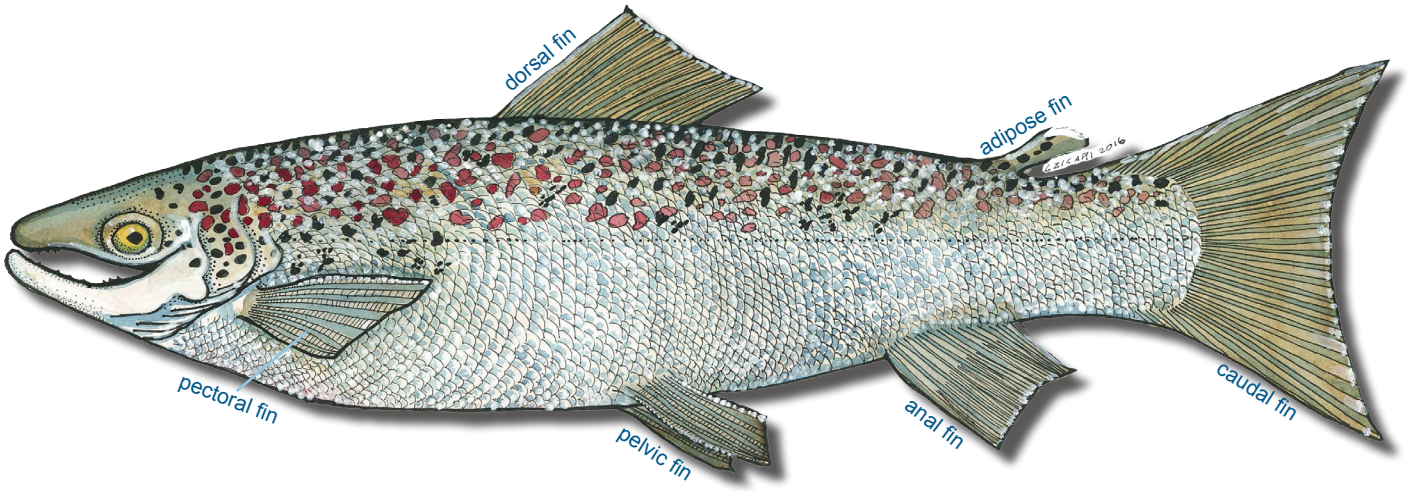

ATLANTIC SALMON

MY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Salmo salar

BY THE NUMBERS

We are usually 28 to 30 inches long, and weigh 8 to 12 pounds; however, people have reported catching us weighing over 100 pounds.

HOW TO IDENTIFY ME

We are bright and silvery with a brown and blue-green back, and a white belly. Our upper body, head and fins sometimes have small black crosses and spots, or red and blue spots when we are young. Males can become more green or red when they are ready to **spawn**. We have a small adipose fin between our **dorsal** and tail fins.

WHY I MATTER AND WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

People say we are delicious to eat! We are very nutritious and a valuable food source for many animals. Hundreds of thousands of us used to migrate from the Atlantic Ocean to the rivers where we hatched to **spawn** new generations of salmon (Figure 1). Only small numbers of us return to North America now, mostly to Maine and eastern Canada. Our numbers are very low primarily due to dams and overfishing. Some of us have been "landlocked" in the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain since the retreat of the glaciers, and we do not migrate out to the ocean.

MY STATUS

Our Gulf of Maine population (Figure 3) is endangered. People are helping us by removing or modifying dams so we can reach our spawning grounds. And our smaller numbers are being supplemented by national fish hatcheries. We are fished by commercial fisherman out in the ocean, but no recreational or commercial fishing is allowed once we have returned to our rivers in the United States. Fishing for landlocked Atlantic salmon is allowed.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Atlantic salmon is one of the largest salmon species.
- They are very fast swimmers and can jump very high – almost 12 feet!
- Their species name, salar, means the leaper because of its amazing ability to leap over rapids and low waterfalls to reach spawning habitat.
- Atlantic salmon are an **anadromous** fish, that begins their life in freshwater and migrates to the ocean to feed and grow, and returns to freshwater to spawn.
- Young Atlantic salmon spend two to three years in their home river before going on a one to three year journey in the North Atlantic where they grow into an adult. They travel over 6,000 miles before coming back home to spawn.
- They sometimes swim 200 miles up the river to find their preferred places to spawn.
- They have been using the same river to spawn for thousands of years.
- They use olfactory (smell) cues to find their home rivers where they were hatched.
- Until the early 1800's, more than 100,000 salmon swam up the Penobscot River in Maine every spring.
- The adult Atlantic salmon stop eating once they return to freshwater. They live off of their body fat for a year or longer.
- The adults seek cold freshwater to spend the summer, and move to swift-running gravelly rivers or streams to spawn in October and November.
- Unlike their Pacific cousins, Atlantic salmon do not normally die after spawning. Instead they migrate back out to the ocean to feed and recover, and if they are not eaten, they return to spawn again.

Fish illustration by Laury Zicari, USFWS, Retired.

MORE ABOUT US

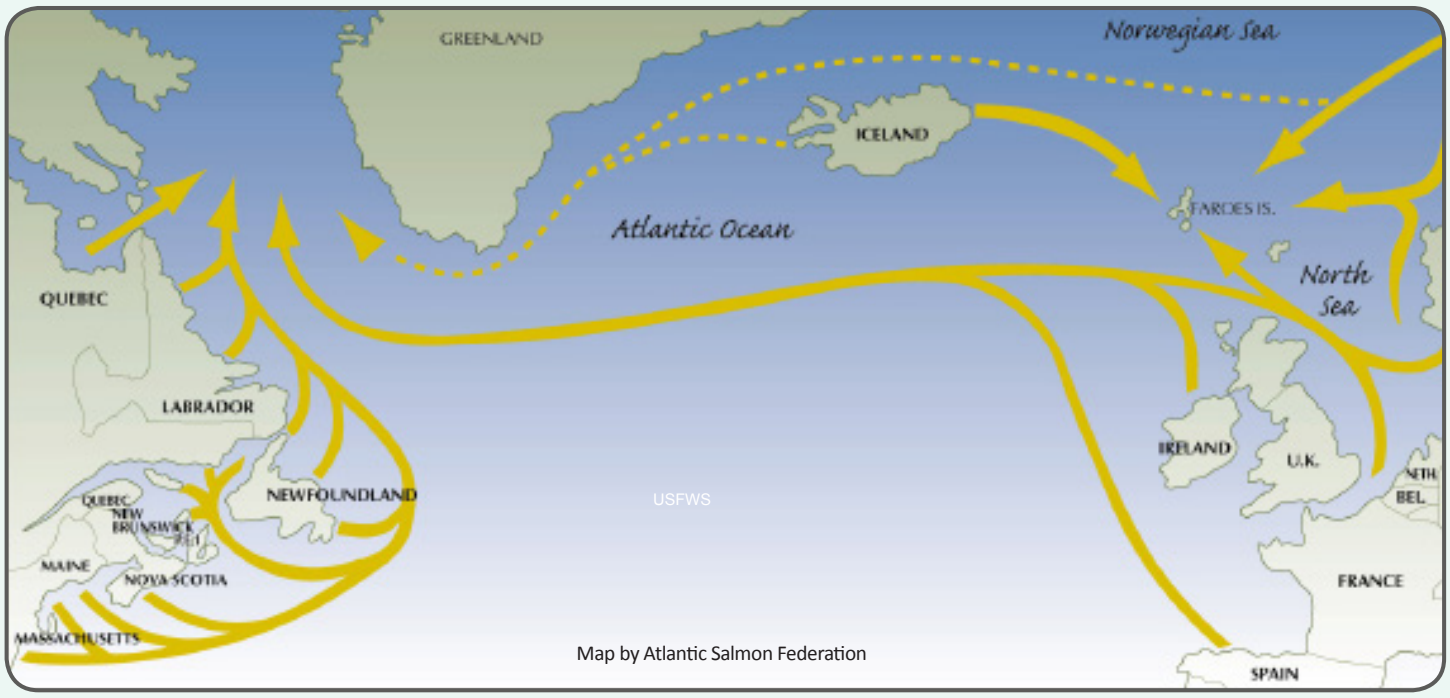

Figure 1 – Atlantic salmon travel thousands of miles to their North Atlantic feeding grounds (arrows), usually near western Greenland. They remain for one to three years before returning to their home river to reproduce.

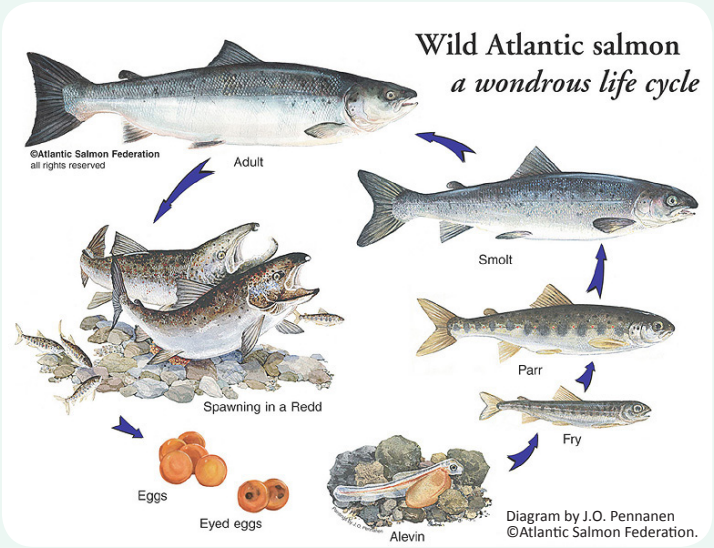

Figure 2 – Atlantic salmon bury their fertilized eggs under a foot of gravel in nests called redds. The eggs hatch in April and May. And after three to four weeks, the fry (very young salmon) swim up through the gravel to hunt for food. The young salmon, called parr, spend one to three years in or very near the stream where they were born. They continue to hunt for food, hiding under and between rocks. When they are about 6 inches long, they are called smolts and ready to live in saltwater. They become silvery in color and then migrate to the ocean, swimming and surfing the ocean currents to their feeding grounds near Greenland!

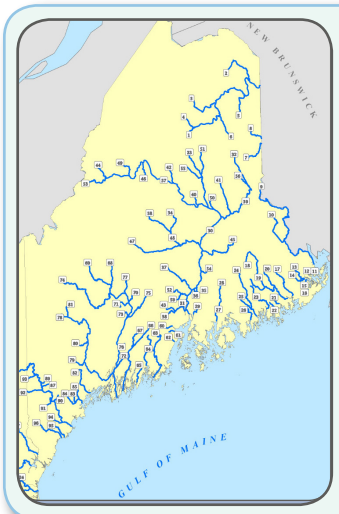

Figure 3 – Gulf of Maine. Many rivers in Maine were home to Atlantic salmon. Today, there are many obstacles that make it hard for them to use some of these rivers.

Learn more about Atlantic salmon!
www.atlanticsalmonrestoration.org

YOU CAN HELP ME

Get to know me, if you don't already. Help make me visible to people who don't have the chance to see me by sharing your stories about me. Get involved in efforts to help conserve my habitat and maintain my populations into the future.